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Prophets of the East: The Ilkhanid Historian Rashīd al-Dīn on the Buddha, Laozi and Confucius and the Question of his Chinese Sources (Part 2)*

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Abstract

The Ilkhanid vizier and historian Rashīd al-Dīn's section on China (the *History of China*) in his world history, the *Jāmiʿal-tawārīkh*, is the first Persian history of the Chinese world. Among other information on China, this text includes accounts of the lives and deeds of the founders of its three major religious and philosophical schools: Buddha, Laozi and Confucius. As a continuation to the first part of the paper, devoted to Rashīd al-Dīn's account on the Buddha, here we focus on the excerpts on Laozi and Confucius, which probably constitute the first discussions of these two figures in the Islamicate world. Reading these excerpts against the background of Chinese sources, striking similarities can be found between Rashīd al-Dīn's accounts and the narratives of Buddhist 'universal histories' of the early Yuan period, belonging to the historiographical production of the Chan school.

Keywords

Rashīd al-Dīn, Sino-Persian Relations, Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, Chinese Sources of *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, Intellectual History of the Mongol Empire

1. The *Life of Laozi*

In the *History*, Rashīd al-Dīn's account of the life of Laozi 老子 (lit. 'Old Master'), a major Chinese philosopher and supposed author of the Chinese classic *Daodejing* 道德經 (The Classic of the Way and Virtue), occurs

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in the same chapter as his life of the Buddha, which we discussed in the first part of this paper. Interestingly enough, Rashīd al-Dīn knows neither Laozi as such, nor the equally common assignation of Li Dan 李聃. Instead, he refers to this figure as Taishang Laojun 太上老君 (The Grand Supreme Elderly Lord), the name of the mythological Daoist ancestor of which Laozi, since the 5th century, was considered to be a manifestation.[1] Amounting to about fourteen lines in the most recent critical edition of the text, his account on Laozi goes as follows:

> When the already mentioned Dīn Wāng sat on the throne, Tāī Shāng Lāūgūn, whom they also consider a prophet, was born. He was from a region by the name of Chū and son of a man by the name of Ḥan. He [Tāī Shāng Lāūgūn] also, like Shākamūnī Burkhān, was generated from the light under a plum tree. He remained in his mother's belly for eighty years. He was four *gaz* and a half tall, had thick eyebrows, a big nose and exceptionally big and prominent ears, so much so that they reached his shoulders. He came out from the left side of his mother and when he was born he already had a white beard. Because of this, the people adored him and accepted him as a prophet. The people who followed him are called Sin Shin. He was born 347 years after Shākamūnī Burkhān, and since his birth to this day – the year of the dragon, corresponding to the year 704 of the *Hijra* – 1.901 years have passed. A description of his religion, his deeds, his qualities and of the differences between his way and that of Shākamūnī Burkhān shall be offered in detail in a specific section [of this book], if God so wills.[2]

[1] On the legends around the figure of Laozi, and on Laozi and Laojun, see Kohn 2008.

[2] *Dīn Wāng-i maḏkūr chūn bi pādshāhī nishast, Tāī Shāng Lāūgūn dar wujūd āmad ki ān aqwām ū-rā nīz payġāmbar mīnihand, wa az wilāyat-ī būda ki nām-i ān Chū ast, wa pidar-rā nām Ḥan būda, wa ū nīz chūn Shākamūnī Burkhān az nūr bādīd āmada, dar zīr-i dirakht-i ālūcha, hashtād sāl dar shikam-i mādar būda, wa bālā chahār gaz wa nīm, wa pīshānī-yi ū dar gū wa abrūhā sitabr wa bīnī buzurg wa gūshhā bi-ġāyat pahn wa buzurg chunānki bi dūsh-i ū mīrasīda, wa az pahlū-yi chap-i mādar bīrūn āmad, wa dar ḥāl-i wilādat rīsh-i sifīd dāsht, badān sabab khalq ū-rā ʿazīz wa muḥtaram dāshtand, wa bi payġāmbarī qabūl kardand, wa nām-i ān qawm ki mutābaʿat-i ū namūdand Sin Shin būda, wa baʿd az Shākamūnī Burkhān sīṣad* [*wa*] *chihil wa haft sāl dar wujūd āmada, wa az wilāyat-i ū tā* [*īn*] *zamān ki* [*lūī*]*ʾīl sāl-i* [*aždahā*] *muwāfiq-i sana-yi arbaʿa wa sabaʿami'ya-yi hijrī, yak hizār* [*wa*] *nuhṣad wa yak sāl mībāshad ki sharḥ-i millat-i ū wa awżāʿwa siyar-i ū wa tafāwut-ī ki miyān-i ṭarīqa-yi ū wa az ān-i Shākamūnī Burkhān ast, dar mawżaʿ-i khwīsh mufaṣṣal gufta shawad. ʾin shāʾa Allāh al-ʿazīz.* (Rashīd al-Dīn 2006: 36–37).

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As we can see, despite its brevity this excerpt contains an impressive amount of details, some of which, beginning with the epithet Taishang Laojun, are rather obscure to the non-sinologist. To resolve the matter, it is once again necessary to turn to Chinese sources. In fact, the sheer amount of Chinese references in this *Life of Laozi* indicates how Rashīd al-Dīn must have drawn it almost integrally from a Chinese source, which at times he probably quoted *verbatim*.[3]

Firstly, Rashīd al-Dīn reports that Laozi was born during the Zhou dynasty under the reign of King Ding 定, who is thought to have reigned between 606 and 586.[4] According to Rashīd al-Dīn, Laozi was born when King Ding sat on the throne (*Dīn Wāng-i maẕkūr chūn bi pādshāhī nishast, Tāī Shāng Lāūgūn dar wujūd āmad*), thus in the 7th century. In the excerpt, however, Rashīd al-Dīn gives other chronological coordinates from which to recover Laozi's date of birth, reporting that the latter was born 347 years after Buddha and 1,901 years before the composition of the *History* (year 704 of the *hijra*, that is, year 1305 A.D.). As we saw while discussing his account on the Buddha, the latter is said to be born 2,336 years before the composition of the text. Thus, we have two possible dates for the birth of Laozi, respectively 684 (=1305-2336+347) and 596 B.C. (=1305-1901). However, it is very much possible that the text has been miscopied here. If we take 347 and change it to 437, in fact, we get 594 B.C. (=1395-2336+437) – only two years away from 596.

In the *History*, Laozi's birth would then be posed at the end of the 6th century. A date which is coherent both with Chinese state-sponsored historiography and with Buddhist universal histories, as shown respectively by an authoritative work of Confucian historiography such as the *Shiji*

[3] A comparative reading with the similar account on Laozi found in the *Fozu* (see Appendix, text II) shows Rashīd al-Dīn's dependence on his source.

[4] In the *History* Rashīd al-Dīn's 'Dīn Wāng' (دین وانگ) is said to be the twentieth king of the twelfth Chinese dynasty, the founder of which Rashīd al-Dīn calls 'Joū Wūwāng' (جووووانگ). As already remarked by Jahn (1971: 39), Rashīd al-Dīn's twelfth dynasty corresponds to the Zhou dynasty; therefore, it is easy to identify Rashīd al-Dīn's 'Joū Wūwāng' with the actual founder of the Zhou dynasty, King Wu (Zhou Wuwang 周武王, r. 1049/45-1043 B.C.). If we ignore the 841-828 B.C. interregnum, as Rashīd al-Dīn does, then the twentieth among the Zhou kings - Rashīd al-Dīn's 'Dīn Wāng' - would indeed be King Ding. For the complete list of the Zhou kings according to Rashīd al-Dīn see his chapter on the Zhou in the *History* (2006: 30–32).

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史記 (Historical Records, completed in 94 B.C.) and the already mentioned *Fozu*. Both, in fact, date Laozi's birth to roughly the same time.[5] Rashīd al-Dīn's chronology can thus be considered quite accurate, especially considering the problematic historicity of the figure of Laozi – about whom the data at our disposal are scanty at best.

The same is true as far as geography is concerned. In fact, the *History* mentions Chu 楚 - a Zhou era kingdom in Jingshan, (present-day Hubei) - as Laozi's birthplace. This is another piece of information corresponding to the data found in Chinese state-sponsored historiography and Buddhist annals, as testified by both the *Shiji* and the *Fozu*. These sources, in fact, mention the same birth-place for Laozi.[6] We can therefore assume that the narrative concerning the prodigious birth of the Daoist master too, and most of the details related to it, were drawn from a Chinese source.

In the *History*, Laozi spends eighty years in his mother's womb, is generated from a light under a plum tree and is of immense stature, with big prominent ears. Equally extraordinary physical features are attributed to Confucius, who is said to have been of gigantic stature and to have been born with a white beard. Such remarks on the size of Laozi and Confucius are also found in the *Fozu*. As far as the detail of the white beard is concerned, the *Fozu* also attributes it to at least one emperor, much like Rashīd al-Dīn himself attributes it to King Ling 周靈王 (r.571-545 B.C.). All these details, which bear a strong symbolic value, are frequently met in Chinese hagiographic accounts of the birth of Laozi.[7]

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[5] See Laozi's biography in Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 63: 2139-2143 and in the *Fozu*, which reports the birth of Laozi in the chapter dedicated to the reign of King Ding (*juan* 3: 0499b27-0499b28). The expression 'universal histories' is borrowed from Schmidt-Glintzer (1982: 12-15). Private historiography of Buddhist compilation was modelled on state-sponsored Confucian historiography and often tried to pose itself as its alternative, critique or complement (Schmidt-Glintzer 1982: 15-19). It is therefore no wonder that much of the information coincides.

[6] *Shiji*, 63: 2139, *Fozu,* 3: 0499b28.

[7] See Kohn 1996, as well as Scarpari's discussion of the subject (2004: XIII-XV). According to Scarpari, Laozi is frequently said to have spent eighty-one years in his mother's womb - eighty-one having a strong symbolic value in Chinese tradition as 9x9, that is the highest number of Yang energy and the total number of *Laozi*'s stanzas - while both the *History* and the *Fozu* reduce this number to eighty, this being yet another proof of how the two texts stem from a common source. As to the big prominent ears, in East Asian iconography these symbolize wisdom and knowledge, and so does the beard.

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The Chinese and Persian narratives also share the assimilation of the circumstances of Laozi's birth with those of the Buddha's. A comparison which Rashīd al-Dīn poses explicitly, when he says that "like Shākamūnī Burkhān", Laozi too (*wa ū nīz chūn Shākamūnī Burkhān*) was generated from the light under a plum tree through a lateral birth. In discussing the life of Laozi, the *Fozu* mentions the detail of the plum tree (see Appendix II) but ignores the light and the lateral birth. However, other similarities point to the use of a Chinese source by the Persian historian. First, the conflation of the figure of the Buddha into that of Laozi is not uncommon in Chinese sources, and also concerns other Western, non-Chinese religious figures such as Mani.[8] Furthermore, while in reporting cases of lateral birth such as that of the Buddha, Indian sources traditionally have the child emerge from the right side, while here Laozi emerges from the left. This detail is typically found in Chinese sources and is due to the left's symbolic status in Chinese culture, which is considered to be superior to the right's (Scarpari 2004: XV). All of the above suggests that the assimilation of the birth of the Buddha with that of Laozi was not Rashīd al-Dīn's original idea. To the contrary, the historian would here be following his source.

The same holds true for Rashīd al-Dīn's proposed comparative reading of Laozi's life and teaching with those of the Buddha, as he states at the end of the *Life of Laozi*. A parallel which, unfortunately, he does not develop in the *History*. Such a comparative reading, however, is explicit in the *Fozu*, where Buddhist terminology is used to explain the main principles of the Daoist doctrine. In so doing, the *Fozu* reflects the perspective of contemporary Buddhist universal histories. Furthermore, it should be noted that this Chinese source refers to Laozi with the derogatory term of *shi* 氏 ('sir', 'mister') instead of resorting to honorific titles more suited to a religious leader. Borrowing this comparison from his source, the Ilkhanid historian might then have wanted to stress it further in his text, in order to better explain the religious landscape of the Chinese world to his readers through comparisons between its major figures. This would fit well with the educational will that Rashīd al-Dīn often shows also in the *Tānksūqnāma*.

[8] See Scarpari 2004: XIII-XV, while on the conflation of the figure of Laozi and Mani see Palumbo 2003.

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Lastly, a third element worth commenting is the designation of Laozi's followers with the name 'Sin Shin' (سن شن). In her critical edition of the text Wang recognises, in these two Persian words, the Chinese Quanzhen school (*Quanzhen dao* 全真道), a Daoist branch that became prominent in Mongol China after having been granted privileges by no less than Chinggis Khan himself.[9] For phonetical reasons, however, this identification does not hold water. A more plausible reading has been proposed by Karl Jahn and Herbert Franke, who equated 'Sin Shin' with *xiansheng* 先生 ('Masters'), a term typically met in Chinese sources of the Mongol period to refer to Daoists.[10] Rashīd al-Dīn borrowing this name is telling of the depth of the cultural exchanges between the various regions of the Mongol Empire, which allowed for the use of a shared, transregional and translinguistic vocabulary.

In the first part of the article, we had the opportunity to appreciate Rashīd al-Dīn's balanced attitude towards the subject he is reporting while analysing his account on the Buddha. In the case of Laozi, the Persian historian follows the same pattern. In the Arabic text, in fact, Laozi, much like Buddha, is referred to with the technical term for the legitimate prophet (*nabī*, Pers. *payġāmbar*).[11] However, rather than directly calling

[9] On the Quanzhen, see Marsone 2010. It should be noted that Daoists enjoyed a favourable position only at the beginning of the Buddhist-Daoist controversy of the Mongol period. The debate between these two doctrines was a recurring element in Chinese religious history. One of its main points was the famous *huahu* 化胡 ('Conversion of the Barbarians') theory, according to which Buddhism was just a form of Daoism spread by Laozi himself after he reached India. However, both the promulgation of this theory and the whole interreligious debate intensified in the 13th century, when gaining the support of the Mongol emperors resulted in consistent political and economic benefits. Following the analysis by Thiel (1961), after the victory of the Buddhists over their opponents in a series of court debates in the 1250s, the initial advantage of the Daoists in the eyes of the Mongol rulers gradually faded. Qubilai's (r.1260-1294) preference for Buddhism further worsened the Daoists' position. All of the above resulted in the issuance, in 1281, of a decree ordering the persecution of Daoism and the destruction of the entire Daoist canon. Even though Qubilai's successors held a more nuanced stance towards Daoism, Buddhism still enjoyed a privileged position until the end of the dynasty. Such high status held by Buddhism in the eyes of Mongol rulers possibly contributed to the rise of Buddhist historiography during the Yuan period.

[10] Jahn 1971: 44.

[11] Arabic text in Blair 2004: fol. 250a-b.

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him *nabī*, Rashīd al-Dīn merely reports that his community considered him as such ("and this people say that he is a prophet", *wa huwa yaz'umu hā'ulā' al-qawm nabī*) and accepted his prophetic message ("For this reason people loved and honoured him, and accepted his prophecy", *wa li-ḏalika al-sabab a'azzu-hu al-nāss wa akramū-hu wa qabilū al-nubuwwa*). The Arabic text, as well as the Persian one, calls his followers – the 'Sin Shin' – *qawm*, an Arabic term which is generally translated with 'people' and which can indicate, in a broad sense, any human community. Lastly, while to designate Laozi's teachings the Persian text uses the word *ṭarīqa* ('way'), which is a technical term frequently used in Sufi literature both in Arabic and in Persian to designate the different Sufi schools, this word is not used in the Arabic life of Laozi, which instead talks of *milla* ('religion' or 'religious community').[12]

The informative and detached attitude maintained by Rashīd al-Dīn in this second case is to be underlined, as it is revealing of his general open-mindedness. To his eyes, in fact, the cases of Buddha and of Laozi were very different. Buddhism was at home at the Ilkhanid court. Thus, Rashīd al-Dīn's concessions towards Buddha's prophetic claims are unsurprising and may easily be accounted for with his unwillingness to antagonise the ruler and his entourage. On the other hand, as well informed as Rashīd al-Dīn could have been on the Chinese world, he must have had a vague idea at best of who Laozi was and of the place he occupied in Chinese intellectual history. Since we have no knowledge of high-profile Daoists at the Ilkhanid court, an open blame of Laozi and his 'religion' by the Ilkhanid historian would have hardly upset the court and the sovereign. Yet, Rashīd al-Dīn does not indulge in any criticism towards Laozi and his followers, about which he merely reports what is found in his source with the detached attitude of the scholar.

As we saw, Rashīd al-Dīn's promise of drawing a more detailed account on Laozi and his doctrine in comparison with those of the Buddha is a broken one, for no such discussion is found in the *History*. Yet, the contemporary reader can easily forgive him for this omission, as contiguous to the account on Laozi is a most fascinating - albeit shorter - *Life of Confucius*, which we shall now consider.

[12] The use of Sufi terminology in reference to Buddha and Buddhism in the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* is discussed in Akasoy 2013.

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2. The *Life of Confucius*

> Līng Wāng already had a beard when he came out of his mother. During his reign Kūnfūzī was born. His father's name was Shūliang, and his mother's Jūshī. Nearby was a large mountain by the name of Nīkū: at the very moment that Kūnfūzī was separated from his mother, that mountain fell, and for this reason he was surnamed 'Nīkū'. He was born with all body hairs. He was nine and a half *gaz* tall, and so wide that to draw his circumference one needed a rope four *gaz* long. His face was scary much like that of a tiger, and he was exceptionally intelligent and perfect. Because of this, most people followed him, and he had three thousand disciples who learned from him. Of these three thousand, seventy-two became kings and high notables. He lived seventy-three years and was born fifty-five years after Tāī Shāng Lāūgūn.[13]

As in the case of the life of Laozi, even at a first glance Rashīd al-Dīn's excerpt on Confucius seems borrowed from a Chinese source. In fact, much like the account on Laozi, this one also shows a remarkable similarity to the *Fozu*.

Rashīd al-Dīn knows Confucius as 'Kūnfūzī' (كونفوزى), which hints at a Middle Mongolian mediation (*Kungwusi*).[14] Furthermore, also for the birth of this figure, the Ilkhanid vizier reports a chronology which is consistent with the narratives of Chinese state-sponsored as well as with Buddhist historiography: Confucius is said to have been born during the reign of a king named 'Līng Wāng' of the Zhou dynasty, who is to be identified with King Ling. In this respect Chinese sources, including the *Fozu*, agree with the *History*: according to the earliest sources that preserve such

[13] *Wa Līng Wāng az mādar rīsh-dār āmada būd, wa dar 'ahd-i ū Kūnfūzī bi wujūd āmad ki pidarash-rā nām-i Shūling būd, wa mādarash-rā Jūshī. Wa dar ān ḥudūd kūh-ī buzurg būda nām-i ān Nīkū dar ān laḥẓa ki ū az mādar judā shud, ān kūh bīuftād, sabab-i* [*ān*] *laqab-i ū Nīkū nihādand. Chūn bizād bar hama andām mūy dāsht, bālā-yi ū nuh gaz wa nīm būda, wa pahnāyash chunān farākh ki chahār gaz-i rīsmān mībāyast tā bi gird-i ū dar āyad, wa ṣūrat-ī muhīb bar mis̱āl-i babr dāshta, wa bi-ġāyat 'āqil wa kāmil būda, wa badān wāsiṭa bīshtar-i mardum murīd-i ū shudand, wa si hizār shāgird dāsht ki az ū 'ilm āmūkhtand, wa az ān jumla haftād u du bi martaba-yi pādshāhī wa buzurgī rasīdand, wa haftād wa si sāl-i 'umr yāft. Ba'd az Tāī Shāng Lāūgūn bi muddat-i panjāh wa panj sāl dar wujūd āmad.* (Rashīd al-Dīn 2006: 37–38)

[14] For the Middle Mongolian name of Confucius see Cleaves 1985: 242, note 5. On the other transcriptions from Middle Mongolian in the *History* see Calzolaio/Fiaschetti 2019: 23, note 13.

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information, Confucius was born in the town of Zhou in the state of Lu in 552 or in 551 - the latter being the date more commonly accepted by scholars.[15]

The time-span given by Rashīd al-Dīn is thus in harmony both with early Chinese sources and with the estimates of contemporary scholars. As to geography, the only reference for Confucius' birth is a mountain named 'Nīkū'. This is the Niqiu 尼丘 of the Chinese sources, the mountain from which Confucius is said to have got his courtesy name (*zi* 字, see Appendix III).

Even though we could find no reference in Chinese sources to its crumbling at Confucius' birth, there is little doubt that Rashīd al-Dīn drew this last detail too from his Chinese source. There surely is no shortage of miraculous births in Islamic hagiographies, but the crumbling of a mountain marking the birth of an extraordinary person is not a frequently met *topos* in Islamic literature. Moreover, there would be no reason for Rashīd al-Dīn to underline the sanctity of a man whose identity was, once again, obscure to him at best, and to whom he does not even refer as a prophet.

Regarding his parents, the name of the father given in the *History* is consistent with what we read in the *Fozu*. So is also the name of Confucius' mother: the 'Jūshī' (جوشی) reported by Rashīd al-Dīn, in fact, is simply a transcription of the Chinese *Zoushi nü* 鄒氏女 ('Madame Zou') found in the *Fozu*, though the latter text underlines that Madame Zou was the first wife of Confucius' father, while the philosopher was born from his second wife, Lady Zheng 徵 of the Yan 顏 lineage (see Appendix, III). Confucius' peculiar physical characteristics, such as the presence of full body hairs at birth, the gigantic size and a tiger-like face, are further similarities between the Chinese narratives and Rashīd al-Dīn's account. In the *Fozu*, in fact, these extraordinary physical features mirror five of the thirty-two canonical attributes of a 'great person' (*daren* 大人, *i.e.* a Buddha), which are mentioned in the comment to the description of the birth of Buddha.[16] The association of Confucius's appearance with the features of Buddha explicitly underlies the charismatic characteristics of this individual.

[15] Traditionally, Confucius's life is placed between 551-479 B.C. For a survey of the issue see Nylan/Wilson 2010.

[16] See Calzolaio/Fiaschetti 2019: 31, note 34.

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Despite these features, however, the *Fozu* does not refer to Confucius specifically in terms of a religious leader. Similarly, the *History* sets Confucius apart from Laozi and Buddha, denying him the status of prophet, even in relation to his own community. Both in the Persian text and in its Arabic version, in fact, the words for 'prophet' never occur.[17] Confucius emerges simply as a great master, and only some Sufi technical terms are mentioned through the text. Those who, impressed by his physical appearance, became his disciples, are called *murīd*, which is a technical term for Sufi disciples and initiates (*kāna akṣar al-nāss murīdu-hu wa kāna li-hu ṣalaṣa alf tilmīḏ yataʿallamūna min-hu al-ʿilm*). In the Persian text Confucius' three thousand students are then called *shāgird*, which is the translation of the Arabic *murid*, while in the Arabic text the same word - possibly to avoid repetitions - is translated with *tilmīḏ* ('student', 'apprentice'), another term which is frequently met in Sufi literature to designate an initiate. In downplaying Confucius' status, both the *History* and the *Fozu* reflect the intellectual environment of their time, for the Mongols did not consider Confucianism a religion, contrarily to Daoism and Buddhism.[18]

3. Tracing Rashīd al-Dīn's Chinese Sources

Rashīd al-Dīn's excerpts on Buddha, Laozi and Confucius, with their many Chinese terms and their reference to East Asian imagery and symbolism, would perhaps fit better in a Chinese rather than in a Persian chronicle. Going beyond these few excerpts, the *History* as a whole does indeed contain a sheer quantity of details and information of clear East Asian provenance, which are not found in any earlier Persian text. Puzzled by such information, when going through the text one cannot help but ask oneself where all this is from. In this regard, a vague acknowledgement of 'Chinese influences' over the text, which explains everything without actually explaining anything, cannot suffice.

This is all the more true if we take into account the importance that Rashīd al-Dīn himself grants to his Chinese sources and informants. His

[17] Arabic text in Blair 2004: fol. 250b.

[18] Instead, Confucianism was in the same category as medicine. See for example Shinno 2016; Atwood 2016.

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text frequently underlines that he is reporting Chinese history "in harmony with what is reported by Chinese chronicles" (*bi mūjib-ī ki dar tārīkh-i khatāyān āmada*, 2006, 13). A claim which rings true in light of the structural similarities between the *History* and its contemporary Chinese chronicles, as well as from the many images and details of clear Chinese origin included by Rashīd al-Dīn in his work, as shown above. Furthermore, in the *History*, the events are told from a traditionally Jiangnan-based and racial view of imperial kingship, distinguishing between Han and Inner Asian dynasties – the latter being considered illegitimate.[19]

The importance of tracing Rashīd al-Dīn's Chinese sources is twofold. First, this is a philologically urgent task without which a real understanding of the text is impossible, giving how close the *History* is to its sources. Secondly, as we shall see, it would allow us to better understand the intellectual environment of the Ilkhanid court in its diversity.

In composing his *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, Rashīd al-Dīn enjoyed the support of the Ilkhanid rulers. As a state-sponsored enterprise, local assistants from the cosmopolitan milieu of the Ilkhanid court – many of whom are named in the text – were used as informants for the composition of the various local histories.[20] In the case of the *History*, the Ilkhanid historian seems to have gathered his information on the Chinese world from two main sources: three informants and some Chinese history books. The informants are all named in the *History*: two of them are Chinese scholars

[19] In this respect, a case in point is the harsh treatment that Rashīd al-Dīn reserves to the dynasties emerging in North China at the beginning of the 4th century. He marks these dynasties as unlawful usurpers and separates them linguistically, structurally and even graphically from the 'lawful' (*aṣlī*) ones. These 'unlawful' dynasties are the Sixteen Kingdoms (304-439), the Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534), the Eastern Wei 東魏 (534-550), the Northern Zhou 北周 (557-581) and the Northern Qi 北齊 (550-577). To distinguish them from the 'lawful' dynasties, Rashīd al-Dīn (2006: 56-60) calls them 'families' (*ṭāīfa*) instead of 'dynasties' (*ṭabaqa*) and relegates them to a separate chapter, which is further separated from the rest of the text by the use of an ink of different colour: "Since respect is due to the dynasties of lawful rulers here we shall not talk of 'dynasties'. Instead of 'dynasties' we shall write 'families', and we shall use ink of another colour in order to distinguish them from their contemporary [lawful rulers]" (*Wa chūn iʿtibār-i ṭabaqāt az pādshāhān-i aṣlī karda āmad īnjā ḏikr-i ṭabaqāt nakhwāhīm kard, wa bi jā-yi ṭabaqa ṭāyifa khwāhīm niwisht wa bi lawn-ī dīgar tā miyān-i īshān wa muʿāṣirān-i īshān farq-ī bāshad*, 55). On this matter, see also Kim 2018.

[20] On the sources of the *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* see Kazuhiko 2013.

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(*ḥukamā-yi Khatāy*) and one is a Mongol official. The latter is easily identified: he is the court official and Yuan ambassador to the Ilkhanate Bolad (1240-1313), a figure of major importance as a cultural broker between Ilkhanid Iran and China.[21] With regard to the two Chinese scholars, however, the situation is less clear. In the preface of the book their names appear respectively as 'Līt̄ājī' and 'Kamsūn', and Rashīd al-Dīn credits them with presenting him some Chinese history books, the content of which they discussed with him.[22] About them, however, nothing else is known.

Regarding the Chinese books that Rashīd al-Dīn says to have consulted under their guidance, he provides information on only one of them. This is a Chinese chronicle composed, according to Rashīd al-Dīn (2006: 8, 11), by three scholars named 'Fūhīn', 'Fīkhū' and 'Shīkhūn' – respectively from the cities of 'Tāīʿānjūy', 'Fīnjū' and 'Lāūkīn'[23] - during the reign of a king named 'Chin Līwān', who is said to have lived 1.044 years before the composition of the *History*.[24] As Rashīd al-Dīn specifies, all three scholars are surnamed (*ṣifat*) 'khūshāng', that is, 'Buddhist monk' (*yaʿanī bakhshī*).[25]

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[21] Bolad, mentioned in Persian sources as 'Pūlād Chīnksānk' (Chinese *Boluo chengxiang* 孛羅丞相, *i.e.* 'Bolad the minister') was a high-ranking Mongol aristocrat who served Qubilai and was dispatched as his representative to the Ilkhanate in 1285. On the importance of Bolad as Rashīd al-Dīn's source on Chinese history see Allsen 2004: 95–101; 1996, while on the Chinese influences over the *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* see Elverskog 2010: 157-160, who however does not seem to take the *History* into account. For some preliminary sinological remarks on this text see Franke 1951.

[22] "As prescribed by the royal edict - may it always be obeyed and executed! - the Chinese scholars by the name of Līt̄ājī and Kamsūn, both well versed in medicine, astronomy and Chinese history, made available and discussed those history books which were in their possession, and which they had brought with them from China" (*Bar wifq-i farmān-i nāfiḏ, lāzāla nāfiḏan wa muṭāʿan, az ḥukamā-yi Khatāy Līt̄ājī wa Kamsūn nām, ki har du bar ʿilm-i ṭibb wa nujūm wa tārīkh-i Khatāy wāqifʿand, wa baʿẓī az ān kutub az Khatāy bā khwud āwarda wa ān maʿānī-rā mustaḥẓar, kutub-i tawārīkh ki dāshtand ḥāẓir gardānīdand wa taqrīr kard*, Rashīd al-Dīn 2006: 8). The transcription of these names in Persian varies in the manuscripts. Here, we follow Rawshan's edition of the text.

[23] According to Wang (Rashīd al-Dīn 2000: 185-186) the cities correspond to Tai'anzhou 泰安州 (in present-day Shandong), Fenzhou 汾州 (in present-day Shanxi) and Luojing 洛京 (Luoyang 洛陽, in Henan).

[24] As remarked by Wang (Rashīd al-Dīn 2000: 186), since Rashīd al-Dīn dates his Chinese source to the year 261 (1044 years before the *History*) 'Chen Liu Wang' can be identified with the prince (*wang* 王) of the state of Chenliu (*Chenliu guo* 陳留國) Cao Huan 曹奐 (245-302) of the kingdom of Wei 魏 (220-266). Given that the *History* places Buddha at the

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Despite the little information available to scholars for tracing the *History*'s Chinese sources, the quest for this text has being going on for more than a century. First was the French Sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (d.1832), who argued that Rashīd al-Dīn mistook for personal names what actually were the first words of the title of his Chinese source, which he thus identified with the *Lidai diwang jinian zuanyao* 歷代帝王紀年纂要 (Abridged Chronological History of the Emperors and Kings) by the famous translator of the Yuan period Chaghān 察罕 (1247?-1322).[26] The French orientalist Edgard Blochet (d.1937) closely followed, suggesting as a possible source the *Guoxue shiji* 國學事跡 (Deeds [of the ancient rulers] for the Dynastic Academy), another brief chronology composed in the

core of the chronology, however, a text from this period (*i.e.* before the establishment of Buddhism as a state religion in China) could hardly be Rashīd al-Dīn's main source. It might have been but one of his sources.

[25] On the use of the Perso-Turkic term *bakhshī* to refer to Buddhist teachers see Doerfer (1963: 271-277). As remarked by Wang (2000: 184-6), since the names of the three scholars are variously transcribed in the various manuscripts of the *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* the corresponding Chinese characters cannot be reconstructed.

[26] Abel-Rémusat 1820: 203-205 and Fuchs 1946, 39 note 8, 62. For Chaghān's biography see Song Lian, *Yuanshi* 元史 (History of the Yuan Dynasty) 137: 3309-3312. The *Lidai diwang jinian zuanyao* is preserved in his revised version under the title *Chongding diwang jinian zuanyao* 重訂帝王紀年纂要 (Rearranged Chronological History of Emperors and Kings) in the collectaneum of the Qing period *Jieyueshanfang huichao* 借月山房彙鈔 (Collected Manuscripts from the Mountain Studio Lending from the Moon) compiled by Zhang Haipeng 張海鵬 (1755-1816). This version of the text also contains the revisions and comments of the Ming scholar Huang Jian 黃諫 (1412-1471) and covers Chinese history up to the end of the Yuan dynasty (*Jieyueshanfang huichao*, 48: 4095). Chaghān's composition does indeed present some similarities with the *History*, especially as far as the structure of the two texts is concerned: both texts are structured as lists of emperors arranged by dynasty, starting with the mythical ancestor Pangu. However, given the *Lidai diwang jinian zuanyao*'s brevity and scarcity of details (only one line is devoted to the life of Confucius, and neither the birth of Laozi nor that of the Buddha are mentioned), it could hardly be Rashīd al-Dīn's main source. Moreover, Abel-Rémusat's hypothesis that Chaghān had translated this text into Mongolian and that it was this version that Rashīd al-Dīn had consulted is controversial. In fact, the Persian historian frequently stresses to have consulted Chinese sources brought by Chinese informants. This claim, as shown in the present paper, is confirmed by several transcriptions of names and toponyms. Furthermore, as noted by Atwood (personal communication, May 10th, 2018), the Mongolian translation of Chaghān's history was produced during the reign of Ayurbarbada Buyantu Qa'an (1312-1320), thus too late to be used by Rashīd al-Dīn.

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Yuan period by Xu Heng 許衡 (1209-1281).[27] Yet, neither of these texts seems to fit as the main model for the *History*, mainly due to their dry and brief style and to the lack of many of the details reported by Rashīd al-Dīn.

A turning point in tracing the Ilkhanid historian's Chinese sources was reached with a learned preliminary study on the matter authored by Franke (1951). Reading the Chinese *heshang* 和尚 ('monk') in the Persian 'khūshāng', in fact, he concluded that Rashīd al-Dīn must have used a Chinese Buddhist source and thus found a Buddhist history from the Chinese Tripiṭaka, the *Fozu*, compiled by the Chan monk Nian Chang. As our comment of Rashīd al-Dīn's three *Lives* shows, there are strong similarities between the two texts. However, as Franke himself remarked, the compilation of this chronicle was achieved too late (in 1333 or 1334) to be consulted by Rashīd al-Dīn, who completed his work before 1310.[28] Thus, the German scholar concluded that there must have been a third text which would be the source both of the *Fozu* and of the *History*, but which he failed to trace.

More recent studies found that in the *Fozu* only the accounts related to the Song (960-1279) and Yuan dynasties (1260-1368) were Nian Chang's original creation, while all the preceding information was copied, among other sources, from two works of the Song period, the *Jingde zhuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Records of the Transmission of the Lamp of the Jingde Era [1004-1007]) by the monk Shi Daoyuan 释道原 (10th-11th centuries),[29] and the *Longxing fojiao biannian tonglun* 龍興佛教編年通論 (Comprehensive Discussion and Chronology of Buddhism of the Longxing Era [1163-4]) by Zuxiu 祖琇 (12th century).[30] These, however, do not bear as many similari-

[27] Blochet (1910: 100-101). This hypothesis, however, has been disproven by Fuchs (1946: 38-39, note 8). Moreover, the *Guoxue shiji* is a mere table of years and emperors, while Rashīd al-Dīn's source must have had a wider character including accounts on the most important events which took place under the various dynasties.

[28] Franke 1951: 23. In particular, the German scholar was persuaded that Rashīd al-Dīn used "a Chinese Buddhist history of China, written under Mongol rule probably after 1294 and before 1310" (1951: 22). A conclusion we share, and which we tried to develop further in the present article.

[29] Daoyuan, *Jingde zhuandeng lu*, CBETA edition (Taishō, 51. 2076: 0196b15-0467a28).

[30] Zuxiu, *Longxing fojiao biannian tonglun*, CBETA edition (*Xu zang jing* 續藏經 75. 1512: 110b21-253c21). On this issue see Chen (2005: 136-140), Thiel (1961: 8 and notes 18 and 19) and Schmidt-Glinzer (1982: 148-153). According to these studies, the *Longxing Fojiao*

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ties to Rashīd al-Dīn's text as the *Fozu*. On this background, it seems plausible that the unknown, possible common source of Rashīd al-Dīn and of the *Fozu* hypothesized by Franke dates back to the early Yuan period.[31]

Internal evidences from Rashīd al-Dīn's text support this hypothesis. First, let us consider the name of one of the cities from which the three scholars who authored Rashīd al-Dīn's Chinese source are said to have come, Tai'anzhou 泰安州 (Rashīd al-Dīn's 'Tāī'ānjūy'). This toponym dates to the Jin period (1115-1234), but it did not become widespread until the Yuan. Thus, Rashīd al-Dīn must have gotten this information either orally or from a Jin-Yuan source, *i.e.* from a post-1125 text.[32] Moreover, even though the appellative 'Taishang Laojun' used by Rashīd al-Dīn does not occur in the description of Laozi's birth in the *Fozu*, Laozi is thus called in the text (and in its commentary) in the chapter dedicated to the Yuan dynasty.[33] This shows how the usage of 'Taishang Laojun' as Laozi's appellative in the Yuan period was not uncommon.

Furthermore, in his *History* Rashīd al-Dīn followed the typical arrangement of Buddhist universal histories written in *biannian* 編年 ('annalistic') style. Such style, as shown by Schmidt-Glinzer, is typical of Chan Buddhist texts.[34] In this regard, it should be noted that Buddhist universal histories started to expand their chronology backwards to include the mythical ancestor Pangu, as Rashīd al-Dīn does, only beginning with the 12th century; a trend which became even more widespread in the Buddhist historiographical production of the Mongol period.[35] These details, together with the evidences discussed throughout the paper, lead us to the conclusion that the *History* reflects Chinese sources from the Buddhist

provided the materials from the period from Han Mingdi 漢明帝 (28-75) onwards, while the rest was taken from the *Jingde*.

[31] Rashīd al-Dīn seems to be well informed about the Mongol conquests and Jin China, as shown for example by his report on the death of the last Jin emperor in 1234 (Rashīd al-Dīn 2006: 70-71). See Atwood 2015. Allsen (2004: 72-102) assumes that this is due to Bolad, who had extensive personal connections in China and acted as Rashīd al-Dīn's informant.

[32] Atwood, personal communication (May 10th, 2018).

[33] See *Fozu*, 21: 0701a06-0714c15.

[34] As opposed to the historiographical production of the Tiantai school, which arranged universal histories in 'biographic-thematic' (*jizhuan* 紀傳) style. See Schmidt-Glintzer 1982: 89-122.

[35] Schmidt-Glintzer 1982: 134-135, with references to Jahn 1971: 9.

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Tripiṭaka of the early Yuan period. In particular, these sources would belong to the historiographical production of the Chan school of Buddhism, which enjoyed an immense popularity and political prestige in Mongol China.[36]

Conclusions

There are three major reasons of interest in Rashīd al-Dīn's accounts on Buddha, Laozi and Confucius. Firstly, these excerpts nuanced and enriched the representation of the Chinese intellectual world until then found in the cultural *Umwelt* of the Persianate and Islamicate world. Buddha and Buddhism were already known to Islamicate intellectuals, and generally received a favourable treatment in Islamic accounts. In this respect, Rashīd al-Dīn's representation of the Buddha fits well into a larger pattern. Laozi and Confucius, however, were novelties. With reference to the terminology established by Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, in this respect Rashīd al-Dīn's *History* can be considered as a sophisticate operation of cultural translation, i.e. of "translation in which the content of the message is changed to conform to the receptor culture in some way, and/or in which information is introduced which is not linguistically implicit in the original".[37] By representing Buddha, Laozi and Confucius as legitimate prophets (or, in the case of Confucius, an extraordinary man) through the use of an Islamic vocabulary, the Persian historian built a bridge between his own public and the Chinese world. The same, however, holds true for the whole *History* and for the *Tānksūqnāma* as well, since most of the information reported in these works were unknown in the Islamicate world.

Secondly, all of the above sheds light on the nature and provenance of some of Rashīd al-Dīn's sources, as well as on the way he used them. Christopher Atwood already noted how the Persian historian often confines himself to reporting what he learnt from informants and written sources.[38] Rashīd al-Dīn's accounts on Buddha, Laozi and Confucius confirm Atwood's remarks. Although a contemporary reader, emphasizing

[36] For an overview see Schmidt-Glintzer 1982: 145-159.

[37] Nida/Taber 1969: 199.

[38] Atwood forthcoming.

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originality over repetition and recovery of precedent material, may regard this attitude as uninspired, it should be noted that Rashīd al-Dīn's operation is, to the contrary, quite original. As with Medieval encyclopaedists, in fact, Rashīd al-Dīn's originality is to be found in his will to establish such a wide intellectual project, in his selection of what to include and what to exclude from his work, in his organisation of this composite material into a unitary framework. As to the nature of the sources of the *History*, our analysis shows that they were Chan Buddhist chronicles of the early Yuan period.

This latter information is relevant to understanding the intellectual framework in which the transmission of knowledge between China and Iran was achieved, as well as to furthering our understanding of Ilkhanid Buddhism. As analysed by Schmidt-Glintzer, Chan annalistic, 'universal' historiography was the most suitable to serve the ideological needs of the Song and Yuan periods. In the case of the Song, the writing of universal histories provided an alternative to the China-centred vision of history at a time in which China was not unified under a single dynasty anymore.[39] Subsequently, by including Chinese history as part of the history of the Buddhist world, Chan historiography provided an alternative, for the Yuan dynasty, to Confucian ideas of legitimation, allowing them to portray the Mongol emperors both as rulers of China and as universal rulers (*cakravartin*).[40] As shown by Franke, this was one of the main purposes of the *Fozu*.[41] The relevancy of these texts for the political project of the Mongols in China determined their success and, consequently, their spreading West to Ilkhanid Iran, which thus received an image of China and of the Chinese world mediated by the pro-Buddhist narrative of these sources.

Lastly, we would like to stress that, despite the remarkable interest that the *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh* attracted in the last two centuries, one would have hardly suspected that a life of Laozi and a life of Confucius hid between its pages. In this, we believe, lies a reminder of how the amplitude of the contents of this work and of Rashīd al-Dīn's intellectual interests

[39] Schmidt-Glintzer 1982: 11-12.

[40] Schmidt-Glintzer 1982: 16-18; Franke 1974.

[41] Franke 1974 and Schmidt-Glintzer 1982: 147-150.

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can never be emphasized enough, but also of how often an activity increasingly out of fashion such as the philologically oriented reading of primary sources can yield unexpected results. What else lies in the *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, one can only speculate; yet, speculate while getting ready for the next dive in the vast ocean which is Rashīd al-Dīn's work, for the search is far from over.

Appendix

II. On the birth and life of Laozi, *Fozu*, *juan* 3: 0499b28[42]

> Sir Lao Dan. In this year [596 B.C.], in the ninth month, fourteenth day, [he] was born in the State of Chu, in the prefecture of Chen, in the county of Ku, in the Lai rural area, in the village of Quren. The *Weishu* (Book of Wei) states.[43] Lao Dan's father's surname was Han, the name Qian and the courtesy name Yuanbi. The mother was called Jingfu ('Perfect and Sufficient'). As the two joined each other, [she] got pregnant. The pregnancy lasted eighty years, then [he] was born underneath a plum tree. From this comes [his] surname (Li). The name is Er (Ear), the courtesy name Boyang. His body was four *chi* and six *cun* in size. The forehead was convex, the eyebrows coarse and reversed, the lips thick. The nose and shoulders were pointy and sharp, the hips wide, the ears long and big, the hair wild. Therefore, his posthumous name was Dan ('Long and Big Ears'). He was believed to keep alone the mystery of the Way in his heart. [He] put to fruit the virtue of the three treasures.[44] The first one is compassion. The second one is frugality. The third one is said, not to dare to reach supremacy under Heaven. In the year *jimao* of King Jing, a purple breeze[45] spread

[42] 老聃氏。於是年九月十四日生于楚國陳郡苦縣賴鄉曲仁里。魏書云。老聃父姓韓名乾字元畢。 母曰精敷。 二合而娠。 孕八十年而生於李樹下。 因以為姓。 名耳字伯陽。身長四尺六寸。 額凸眉龐反唇騫鼻髆尖胯闊聃耳鬈頭。 故謚曰聃。 以疑獨之道祕于心。三寶之德資于用。一曰慈。二曰儉。三曰不敢為天下先。景王己卯紫氣浮關。 欲往流沙。時有函關令尹喜。知道之人也。乃請言教。老氏遂著道德二篇。合五千言。皆評大道也。既而弗克。至于流沙。薨于槐里。年八十四歲。

[43] Whether the *Weishu* here refers to the state-sponsored History of the Northern Wei Dynasty by Wei Shou 魏收 (507–572) is unclear. If so, the period would agree with what Rashīd al-Dīn writes about his sources, as well as with the period identified by Wang (see note 59).

[44] This phrasing reminds of Buddhist terminology. In Buddhist texts, the three treasures (*sanbao*三寶) are the Dharma, the Saṅgha, and the Buddha.

[45] This is an auspicious omen signalling the birth of an emperor or a sage.

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at the [mountain] pass. [He] wished to reach the Shifting Sands.[46] At that time the district magistrate at the Han Pass was Xi. He was a person who knew the Way. Therefore, he begged [him] to teach his doctrine. Sir Lao thus compiled two texts on the Way (*dao* 道) and on the Virtue (*de* 德). They were five thousand words in total. They all revised the Great Way. When he was done, he became unconquerable.[47] He reached the Shifting Sands and died in Huaili, aged eighty-four.

III. On the birth and life of Confucius, *Fozu*, *juan* 3: 0500a11[48]

Master Kong was born in the State of Lu, in the present-day prefecture of Yan, in the Zou county, in the rural area of Ping, in the town of Jinchang. In the ninth generation after Duke Shiyin, in the winter of the twentieth year of Duke Xiang, at the beginning of the eleventh month, day four. According to the "Basic Annals of Yin" (Yin *benji* 殷本紀). The surname of Master Kong's father was Shuliang, the name was He. [He] was county magistrate at Zou. First, he married a woman of the Zou lineage and gave birth to a son [named] Meng Pi, who had no reputation. Then, he took a wife from the Yan lineage, named Zheng. As husband and wife they prayed to the Niqiu Mountain and Master Kong was born. He was born with full body-hair. He was nine *chi* and six *cun* tall, his waist was ten *wei*. The arms, straight, surpassed his knees.[49] [He had] pupils like a river, mouth like a sea, dragon countenance on his face. Imposing in size as a phoenix, his facial features were powerful, the moustaches long and curly, he had the look of a tiger.[50] He had the virtue of the Mean and Harmony. His clothes were adorned and dignified, the expression mild and severe.

[46] The term *liusha* 流沙 indicates a non-specified and hard to reach location bordering the Western Regions (*xiyu* 西域).

[47] In an alchemical sense.

[48] 孔子生于魯國今兗州鄒邑平鄉晉昌里。實隱公後第九代襄公二十一年冬十一月初四日。按殷本紀。孔子父姓叔梁名紇。為鄒邑宰。先娶鄒氏女。生子孟皮。不才。 後娶顏氏女名徵。在夫婦禱尼丘山而生孔子生而有髮。身長九尺六寸腰帶十圍。垂手過膝。河眸海口龍顏方顙。鳳顒燕頷虬髭虎視。有中和之德。衣莊而嚴。色溫而厲。

[49] This is one of the canonical attributes of a Buddha.

[50] The descriptions of the eyes, the hair, the face and the comparison with the tiger (or a lion) remind of the signs of a Buddha, on which see Calzolaio/Fiaschetti 2019, 31 and note 34.

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Errata corrige

In the previously published part 1 of the present article, page 27, we state that, in the *History of China*, the Buddha emerges from the left side of his mother. As our own translation of the relevant section of the text in the same article shows, this is a mistake. Both in the *Fozu lidai tongzai* and in the *History*, Buddha is said to emerge from the right side of his mother.

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